

Chapter One: Introduction and Purpose

“Diversity has always characterized the biosphere to which man belonged. In living systems, complexity brings stability and ability to withstand change. The future survival of man may well depend on the continued complexity of the biosphere.”

– Raymond Dasmann

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MDFW) is the state agency responsible for the conservation, management and restoration of the state’s fish and wildlife resources. In addition to very public and well known activities such as regulating the deer herd and stocking trout for recreational anglers, the MDFW plays an important role in the conservation of many species less well known by the public but no less important, which make up the biodiversity of the Commonwealth. Three recent publications highlight this commitment to conserving biodiversity. The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) will use these efforts as the basis for identifying a broader list of species in greatest need of conservation, highlighting the habitats they require, identifying threats to the species and their habitats, listing additional information needs through survey and research, and finally, developing conservation strategies and monitoring efforts which will ensure their continued existence.

In 1998 the Natural Heritage Section of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MDFW) and the Massachusetts Chapter of the Nature Conservancy published a document titled *Our Irreplaceable Heritage*. The authors called *Our Irreplaceable Heritage* a call to action and a prescription for biodiversity conservation in Massachusetts. Important community types were identified as conservation targets for protecting rare and threatened plants and animals in Massachusetts. In 2001 the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) of the MDFW published *BioMap: Guiding Land Conservation in Massachusetts*. *BioMap* identifies those areas of Massachusetts most in need of protection to conserve biodiversity for generations to come through a systematic evaluation of over 7,000 site-specific records of rare plants, rare animals and natural communities. *Living Waters: Guiding the Protection of Freshwater Biodiversity in Massachusetts* was published in 2003 by the NHESP of the MDFW. The purpose of *Living Waters* is to identify and map lakes, ponds, rivers and streams that should have the highest priority for freshwater biodiversity conservation in Massachusetts. This work is based on over 600 records of rare freshwater species along with other data sets on fish, aquatic insects and aquatic plant communities in Massachusetts.

Today we present our Massachusetts Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The U.S. Congress established the State Wildlife Grant Program in 2001 to provide federal funds to help states conserve their species in “greatest conservation need.” In order to qualify for these funds each state must complete a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy which will address the species the state fish and wildlife agency deems to be “in greatest conservation need,” while addressing the full array of wildlife and wildlife-related issues. Funds appropriated under the State Wildlife Grant Program are allocated to the states according to a formula which takes into account each state’s size and population. The CWCS must be completed by October 5, 2005. The CWCS must then be approved by a National Acceptance and Advisory Team (NAAT). The

NAAT will, in turn, determine if the CWCS has met each of the eight elements required by the Congress. The required elements are:

1. **Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife** with low and declining populations which are indicative of the diversity and health of the State's wildlife;
2. **Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types** essential to the conservation of the species identified in #1;
3. **Description of problems** which may adversely affect the species identified or their habitats, **and priority research and survey efforts** needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and their habitats;
4. **Description of conservation actions** proposed to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions;
5. **Proposed plans for monitoring** species identified in #1 and their habitats; for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in #4; and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions;
6. **Descriptions of procedures to review the strategy** at intervals not to exceed ten years;
7. **Plans for coordinating the development, implementation, review and revision of the plan with Federal, State, and local agencies and Native American tribes** that manage significant land and water areas within the state or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats;
8. Congress also affirmed through this legislation that **broad public participation** is an essential element of developing and implementing these plans, the projects that are carried out while these plans are developed, and the Species in Greatest Need of Conservation that such programs and projects are intended to emphasize.

Our intent is to make the CWCS as effective a tool as it can possibly be; to better understand the species we have identified as being in greatest need of conservation and their habitats; to identify the threats they face; to determine what conservation actions will best protect them and their habitats; and to determine how we will monitor these populations and review our efforts in a timely manner. In order to accomplish this, we will lay out several guiding principles in the document which we intend to follow to meet these objectives.

First, we are going to continue ongoing efforts to protect the biodiversity of the Commonwealth. We will then build on past efforts (such as *BioMap* and *Living Waters*, the Fish Habitat Initiative, and Sustainable Forestry) to include the additional species and habitats identified as in greatest need of conservation. Finally, we will describe our plans to develop new efforts within our agency and with our partners in conservation to become proactive and strategic in our approaches to protecting the biodiversity of the Commonwealth.